

SE(i)Zing

India through
Tourism


Equations



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Preface

The last year and a half have seen widespread protests, even violent struggles across the nation against forced land acquisition for creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). SEZs are being created under the Special Economic Zone Act 2005, a model promoted with frenzy by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC) with the promise of creating jobs, ushering investment and heralding unprecedented economic growth in the country. Making the most of a central Act that empowered states to create such exclusive 'growth' zones, government have gone on a widespread drive of acquiring, leasing out and selling land to private and government developers. The central government's fast track approval of over 237 SEZ proposals has led to total land area acquired of approximately 134,000 hectares for 67 multi-product SEZs alone. Claims of the MoC that agricultural land has been left untouched and not a single farmer has been displaced by SEZs created thus far are far from the truth, as it is farmers groups that are leading protests around the country.

When the SEZ Act was passed in 2005, it generated a euphoric response from the private sector. However it has raised concerns from those who do not see SEZs benefiting them but rather increasing hardships of economic livelihood and sustenance of people.

Large scale forced displacement, uncertain and inadequate

employment opportunities for local people, massive unregulated exploitation of natural resources and environment, no public consultation, complete lack of transparency in the process of earmarking an area for the establishment of such a zone to the step of granting of approval to start operation are just few of the many concerns raised by the farmers groups, fisher folk communities and broad based peoples movements against SEZ projects in India. The issue of development and the links between growth and development are completely missing in the model of SEZ.

Tourism is also in the list of industries seeking potential benefits from the SEZ policy. This is because, according to the SEZ Act, 2005 and corresponding Rules, only 25% - 35% of the total area in any SEZ need be statutorily used for developing and setting up of the industrial/ manufacturing units. The rest of the land can be used for developing infrastructure. 'Infrastructure' according to the same SEZ Rule includes 'social amenities' like roads, housing, hospitals, hotels, leisure, and recreation and entertainment facilities. This gives an open invitation to the hospitality, entertainment and hotel sectors to make the most with SEZs. These industries' hopes were given a shot in the arm when the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) proposed to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture that the government should also consider Special Tourism Zones (STZs) on the lines of SEZs.

With these rapid developments, hasty proposals and widespread protests, we in EQUATIONS present this short campaign booklet to serve as an update and reference of the key issues emerging in this debate. With our focus on tourism, the booklet captures critical links between the SEZ policy and role of tourism that needs our continued campaign focus. We hope it serves as a useful reference and spreads awareness on the need to intensify our struggles against this policy.

SE(i)ZING India!

An analytical paper that questions the STZ concept for India

EQUATIONS, November 2006

The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh in a recent interview to the media termed the agitations across the country against the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as "*Expressions of a functional democracy*" and reiterated that the sustained agitations and protests from far flung places around the nation need not be perceived as a weakness of the system.¹ He might have to gear up for more opposition with the central government now planning to cash in on the SEZ frenzy through setting up of Special Tourism Zones (STZs) across the country.

The Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India is considering setting up STZs, on the lines of SEZs, to boost tourism and increase investment, employment and infrastructure through it². It is working on advice from the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) and private players for this proposal. In addition to the current national furore against the SEZ policy, this new proposal from the government to use the SEZ model to promote tourism through STZs has to be challenged on the economic, democratic, environmental and social concerns that arise.

1. Refer "Conflict Zones", Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, **Frontline**, 20th October, 2006, Pg 4

2. Refer "Borrowing SEZ idea, Centre starts working on Special Tourism Zones", 7th November 2006, **Indian Express**, New Delhi.

Why is the SEZ Policy being opposed?

When the SEZ Act was passed in 2005, it generated a euphoric response from the private sector. The general feeling was that the government had finally given the space and incentive for private industry in upcoming sectors like IT-ITES, BT, real estate, and pharmaceuticals to boom. The last eight months have seen an unprecedented rise in SEZ fever with state governments undertaking widespread acquisition and leasing out/selling land for SEZ development. Concerns have been raised by all who do not see SEZs benefiting but rather increasing hardships for economic livelihood and sustenance of people. And these concerns are not unfounded.

Some of the prime concerns being raised by farmers groups, fisher folk communities, marginalized communities and other movements on the government's SEZ policy are:

- Large scale and unjustified acquisition of land
- Inadequate resettlement and rehabilitation policies and plans
- Inadequate employment opportunities for local people through SEZs leading to loss of livelihood
- Increasing burden on natural resources and the environment and alienation of local communities from these resources
- SEZs contributing to real estate boom and creating real estate zones
- Potential revenue loss from heavy subsidizing in SEZs
- Concerns over the process of approving and implementing SEZs – where is local government consultation and sanction?
- No wider public consultation

The main question that voices and agitations across the country are raising is if SEZs are truly meant to boost growth, what is the intended growth and for whose benefit? Going by the SEZ policy, private profit seems to be the barometer of growth and the preference by policy is for private players to lead the nation's growth. The issue of development and the links between growth and development are however missing.

The government has even been cautioned by its own financial bodies. The Reserve Bank of India, Planning Commission and even lead economists of the IMF have been crying hoarse over potential revenue losses through SEZs. Much to the chagrin of industry, the RBI has even resorted to stringent measures of directing all nationalized banks not to give credit at concessional rates to SEZ developers and treat it on par with real estate. There have been some even more interesting objections to SEZs like the Home Ministry objecting to an upcoming multi-product SEZ project in Kamrup, Assam on security grounds. In response to such criticism from all quarters, Commerce Minister Kamal Nath himself publicly said that prime agricultural land should be spared from SEZ development. But as the above summary indicates, concerns on SEZs go much beyond farmland and whether all the others issues have been satisfactorily addressed is questionable.

Why STZs must be challenged

Tourism is the fastest growing sector in the services industry globally. Over the years, the arguments for tourism promotion have changed from merely its capacity to bring in foreign exchange to creating more income and employment opportunities for local communities. But the empirical evidence to support these arguments - especially linking increased investment in tourism to employment and income benefit to locals - are negligible.³ In addition, it is also true that tourism is the least regulated sector. Under cover of myths of it being smokeless, tourism's adverse economic, environmental, ecological, social and cultural impacts rarely come under the scanner. Therefore, it is a matter of grave concern when the government chooses to promote tourism through a model like SEZs, which do not address these inequities, imbalances and impacts, or ensure benefits to local communities.

3. Refer "Weighing the GATS on a development scale: the case of tourism in Goa, India", **EQUATIONS** January 2004, Bangalore.

STZ: old wine in a new bottle?

The concept of identifying specific areas/zones for intensive tourism development is not new. It was first introduced in the National Tourism Policy of 1992 through Special Tourism Areas (STAs). When the STA policy was proposed in 1992, some of the identified locations were Bekal (Kerala), Sindhudurg (Maharashtra), Diu, Kancheepuram and Mahabalipuram (both Tamil Nadu). It is important to learn from the historical experiences of these locations on what have been the experiences of local communities in those potential STAs.

Consider Bekal in Kerala and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra. The long-term objective of the government converting the entire Konkan coastal belt into a tourism hub was reflected in the choice of places like Bekal and Sindhudurg that border the Konkan coast, with Goa being right in the centre. Large-scale infrastructure projects like the Konkan Railway and Mangalore Airport were seen to facilitate the movement of tourist traffic. In Bekal, a total area of 1000 acres with 11 km. of beach stretch was acquired through a 'single window clearance' mechanism with an initial investment of 1000 crores for development of the STA. The plan was to construct an International Tourist Village in Bekal. A resort of international standards that was to cater to the needs of foreign tourists with facilities like adventure sports, golf courses and tennis courts⁴. For the project to become a reality, 30000 farming and fishing families covering four fishing panchayats would have been rendered homeless and would have lost traditional livelihoods⁵. A writ appeal petition was filed in the Kerala High Court in 1995 highlighting that the project was being planned and pushed ahead with great secrecy, it would violate the Coastal Zone Regulation, had not complied with necessary Environmental Impact Assessments and superseded the rights of the panchayats. Following sustained struggles by the affected communities on the ground

4. The Bekal Resorts Development Corporation (BRDC) Brochure, states the 'Bekal Game Plan' as follows 'Identify, acquire and develop potential resort sites, strengthen infrastructure through roads, power, water supply and sewage systems, invite promoters and investors and market Bekal as an international destination'.

5. "Bekal Tourism Project: An SOS call", **EQUATIONS ANLetter** Volume II Issue 4 November 1996

supported by larger campaigns against this project, it was finally withdrawn.

In Sindhudurg, a stretch of land of 84 kms in length and 1 km in width, situated on the south Konkan coast belt was identified by the central government to be an STA. Large acres of agricultural land were acquired by the government for the construction of 5 star hotels, resorts and the proposed Oros Airport. Tourism development in the region was to cater specifically to the needs of foreign tourists with the sole intention of bringing in foreign exchange. The image of Sindhudurg as a 'foreign tourist destination' has not only made it completely inaccessible to domestic tourists due to its ultra - expensive nature but also has gradually adulterated its socio - cultural ethos. Tourism activities have caused the displacement of locals from areas like Mithabao, Tarkali, Shiroda and Malwan giving rise to anti - tourism protests and demonstrations in many places. In both the cases, the project failed to understand the ethos and concerns of the local community with respect to issues related to livelihood, environmental degradation to the region and cultural erosion. The only motive behind the project was generating greater revenue and creating a tourist hub on the lines of Goa.

The message in the bottle - the current STZ concept

The STZ idea currently being floated by the MoT, specifically to capitalize on the SEZ model, comprises the following features⁶:

- STZs are to be located in tourist destinations, cities, along the coastline
- Government should provide single window clearance
- 100% tax exemption for a period of 10 years
- Each STZ should be able to provide 2,000 to 3,000 hotel rooms
- Facilities for shopping, entertainment
- Exemption from import duty on capital goods
- Withdrawal of luxury tax, lower VAT and

6. *Id.* 2

- Exclusive NRI tourism zones or elite world tourist zones for high-end global tourists

The government hopes that with these incentives, private investors will come flocking to STZs resulting in improved infrastructure (i.e. improved even beyond that in existing SEZs), increased economic activities (i.e. providing an enabling environment like hotels, amusement parks, entertainment facilities, shopping malls for business to thrive) and creation of jobs for the “dependent communities” in the STZ area.

Some of the states, which are already considering setting up STZs, are Kerala, Haryana, Delhi and Maharashtra. In Kerala, the Malabar region, high ranges and Wayanad belt are being proposed for STZs where the stress would be on tourism-related infrastructure development⁷. In Delhi, the proposed Commonwealth Games Village is being considered for an STZ. As early as 2004, the Punjab, Haryana and Delhi Chamber of Commerce of Industries (PHDCCI) had submitted a proposal to the Delhi government asking for STZ status for the 250-acre games village as a 'one-stop shop' for all tourists into Delhi⁸. In Maharashtra, the Gorai-Manori-Uttan area has been proposed for a specific Tourism and Entertainment SEZ⁹. The Subhash Chandra promoted Essel Group, which is the developer of this 1000-hectare plan, will invest Rs 500 crore in developing the Zone that promises to be Disneyland, Hollywood and Las Vegas rolled into

one¹⁰. The land for the venture has been identified near Essel's already existing amusement park near Mumbai.

It is clear that the nature of tourism that will be promoted through the STZ model is investment-driven, international and elite-tourist focused, resource heavy and even more unregulated. Such a model has been contested earlier when STAs were proposed and there is sufficient reason to oppose the current proposed STZ model as well.

Creating enclaves for tourism?

STZs, STAs and like-named models promote “enclavisation”, which in the context of tourism refers to the process of converting tourist locations into exclusive 'islands' where elite tourism can flourish - thereby detaching them from the local environment, culture and economy. Globally, the process of enclavisation in tourism has been a result of the need to create exclusive centres of tourism, which exploit local resources but give back little benefit to the local economy. Enclaves are also often viewed as safe investments, which would ensure a steady, continuous and reliable flow of income from tourism through all seasons. The concept of enclavisation can also be interpreted to signify a creation of employment enclaves where tourism development provides certain kinds of employment to certain kinds of labour force, locking the local community out, without providing them a chance to benefit from the “zone”.

The STZ concept has several international counterparts, especially in island nations like the Caribbean, Fiji and Maldives. The intense resource usage by tourism establishments, the resultant environmental pollution, widened income inequalities and socio-cultural effects are some of the adverse impacts being experienced in tourism enclaves around the world. Local communities are yet to see visible economic gains from tourism in these regions as economic returns have just not 'trickled down' to their level. Generally, it is observed that the employment opportunities have also been limited to low-end jobs like housekeeping and support services like cleaning, gardening, security and occasional guide services, except

7. Refer “Special tourism zones would boost Kerala's economy”, 20th Sep 2006, www.domain-b.com

http://www.domain-b.com/industry/tourism/20060920_zones.html

8. To provide an incentive to potential investors, PHDCCI had requested the Government for basic infrastructure support like road networks, drainage systems, potable water supply, sanitary sewer and waste management, electric power supply distribution and telecommunications. Refer “Commonwealth Games 2010: Special Tourism Zone proposed for Delhi”. Refer **Project Monitor**, India's First Newspaper on projects. <http://www.projectmonitor.com>

9. As taken from the Mumbai City Development Plan (MCDP), ‘the scope of this project could easily extend to establishment of an Entertainment SEZ, with focus on tourism and entertainment. This is based on the fact that substantial potential exists in Mumbai in the form of entertainment industry and the film and television industry. The exports potential in the entertainment sector has been growing and this needs to be tapped and supported through the SEZ. Particularly the animation film industry has potential for development in SEZ’

10. Refer “Chandra pitches for gaming SEZ”, **Business Standard**, 14th March 2006.

in cases where developers have taken special effort to build capacity of the local communities on skills and language¹¹.

The proposed STZ concept by the Government of India has all the makings of a tourism enclave, which will not ensure long-term benefits to local communities. What meaningful employment, which is high-end and skill-based can local communities currently living in tourism areas hope for, in shopping malls, amusement parks, spas and luxury business hotels? In an industry that is already biased against local community/ unskilled labour, STZs will only increase the division without integrating capacity-building measures. Moreover there are already reports of foreign workers being brought in for employment in Indian SEZs, mostly in cases when the private developer/investor themselves are foreign¹².

In fact, the potential for tourism-related activities being high in all SEZs and not only STZs, this will have a high compounded effect on local communities. This is because according to the SEZ Act and the Special Economic Zone Rules 2006 (to be referred as Rules), only 25% (in case of IT services or SEZs for special products the limit is 35%) of the total area in any SEZ need be statutorily used for developing and setting up of industrial/ manufacturing units for the designated purpose for which the SEZ was created. The rest of the land can be used for developing infrastructure where 'infrastructure' according to the same Rules includes 'social amenities' like roads, housing, hospitals, *hotels, leisure, and recreation and entertainment facilities* (emphasis added). The tourism industry has already begun to make full use of this opportunity and is in the process of building tourism projects, resorts and other establishments within already existing or upcoming SEZs¹³. The nature of leisure and entertainment tourism likely to be promoted within STZs and SEZs is not in forms where communities will be benefited or can participate.

11. Refer "A WTO-GATS-Tourism Impact Assessment Framework for Developing Countries", **EQUATIONS and EED**, October 2005.

12. Refer "Home Ministry nixes foreign SEZ workers", **The Indian Express**, Delhi Edition, 2nd November 2006.

13. For instance, real-estate giant DLF is tying up with hotel-major Hilton to build hotels across the country for its SEZ business. In line, DLF has already signed a MoU with the Punjab government for an 11000 multi-product SEZ at Amritsar and two others at Ambala and Gurgaon. Refer "DLF likely to tie up with Hilton", **Business news of Construction**, <http://news.jimtrade.com/200606/1535.htm>

Land grab and tourism-induced displacement

STZs propose to provide tourism developers with land at subsidized rates on lease for 15 years as per the SEZ model. While it might seem that the land requirements for tourism activities are not high, this is not true. The tourism and entertainment SEZ in Gorai-Manori is acquiring 1000 hectares, the Delhi Commonwealth Games Village STZ requires 250 acres and the Haryana government's planned Tourism Economic Zone in Gurgaon to build "Disneyland" is going to grab huge tracts of land as well although no official figure on size of this project has yet been quoted. According to estimates based on proposals for SEZs, the total land that has been acquired or would be acquired for formally approved projects is to the tune of 30,000 hectares. The SEZ projects that have got "in principle approval" and those that are "under consideration" are expected to consume another 95,000 hectares. This would mean a total of 1,25,000 hectares almost the size of Delhi which has an area of approximately 1,40,000 hectares. According to the Maharashtra based SEZ Virodhi Sangharsha Samiti, the quantum of land itself points towards large-scale displacement of people¹⁴.

Land use in India is not confined to cultivation but also extends to collective use for day-to-day survival. Fuel, fodder, and other non-timber forest produce requirements are met from land, which could be categorised as common property resources or *charagah, gaucher, pandit bhoomi* in local languages, but is referred to as wasteland by the government. This forms almost 20 percent of the total geographical area of the country¹⁵. These lands contribute to almost 12% of the income of poor households. In states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan pastoral communities depend entirely on these lands for livestock rearing¹⁶. To add to the complexity, by law, wetlands are designated by most state administrations as wastelands¹⁷. The shift by the Commerce Ministry from agricultural land to "wasteland" does not mitigate the problem

14. Refer "Conflict Zones", Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, **Frontline**, 20th October, 2006, Pg 7.

15. Refer to "Don't call it Wasteland", Manshi Asher, **The Times of India**, 12th October 2006, Editorial.
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/2151679.cms>

16. *Ibid*.

17. Issue flagged by Sudarshan Rodriguez, a researcher working on issues related to coastal ecology and wetlands.

but actually makes the issues of displacement, marginalisation of most vulnerable communities even more invisible and therefore insidious.

The private developers are not only in the fray to develop already demarcated SEZ areas but are identifying and buying land on a large scale across the country for future expansion of SEZs¹⁸. The pro-SEZ lobby might argue that land grabbing is not a new phenomenon and is not due to SEZs. It is true that with growing demand for infrastructure like roads and residential spaces, land grabbing in and around urban centres had started much before. However, the new phenomenon is that of acquiring vast tracks of land even in semi-urban and rural areas- which means that the large tracts of agricultural lands and lands used for other customary practices like grazing land and common property land are getting targeted. The varied profile of protesters across the nation substantiates this point. Eminent historian Sumit Sarkar of Delhi University describes the trend as "the biggest land grab movement in the history of modern India"¹⁹.

Contrary to popular belief, tourism also displaces. The physical displacement of people through tourism-related projects may not be as high as in the case of mining, dam and industrial projects. But its adverse impact on livelihoods, access to resources, decision-making powers of the community and socio-cultural ethos is no less than any other development project, which is forced. Development of resorts in forest areas, the coast, national parks and sanctuaries and mushrooming hotel complexes in urban spaces have displaced forest dwellers, fishing communities and the urban poor in large numbers, without basic notions of informed consent.

As a principle, any policy on resettlement and rehabilitation should be based on avoiding forced displacement in the first place and

evolving non-displacing alternatives. It becomes imperative that a just rehabilitation policy for displacement, irrespective of its scale, be set in place before planning the land intensive development such as STZ/ SEZ. The record of implementation on compensation and rehabilitation has been dismal in this country, as many mass struggles have shown.

Apart from the farmer who owns the agricultural land, the agrarian economy also subsists agricultural labourers. Approximately 30-35 % of the population in most villages of India depends on various kinds of labour associated to agricultural practices. These are usually *dalits* and most marginalised in the social and economic hierarchy. Even if the farmer, who owns the land, can dream of some compensation in the form of sale proceeds of the agricultural land, what about the compensation/rehabilitation to landless agricultural labourers whose livelihood is even more vulnerable? It is most ironic that the government is proposing tourism as the alternate livelihood option for the increasingly displaced and marginalized agricultural labour.

The costs of tax exemptions and incentives

The *mantra* of foreign exchange earnings through tourism has resulted in the sector enjoying high incentives and tax holidays for the last 15 years in India. The National Tourism Policy of 1992 which accorded tourism 'industry' status, set the trend for investment incentives like tax exemptions and subsidized infrastructure support to which state governments added on in subsequent years. In its 15 years of having enjoyed fiscal incentives and a liberalised policy autonomously, investment in tourism has seen no major improvements and its contribution to national GDP is still under 6%²⁰. How beneficial the government's incentive policy has been in boosting investment and increasing direct income and employment opportunities in tourism is debatable. The expected revenue earnings that need to accrue to state exchequers from tourism exports have not yet been matched.

18. Companies, including most of India's most famous firms, have filed more than 400 applications to set up SEZs and 212 have been approved. Refer to "Cash Cows", **The Economist**, 14th-20th October 2006, Pg 31. According to domestic data, the government had by September 2006, cleared a total of 267 SEZs of which 150-got formal and 117 in principle approvals. According to industry estimate it is perhaps the biggest push for industrial expansion in post-independence India. Refer "SEZ-Good, Bad, Ugly", **India Today**, 9th October, 2006, Pg 53.

19. Refer "Subversive Enclaves", V. Sridhar, **Frontline**, 20th October 2006, Pg 19.

20. For a detailed summary of estimated contribution of tourism and allied activities to India's GDP, refer to "Tourism Satellite Account for India", **Commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and carried out by the National Council for Applied Economic Research** January 2006.

The SEZ policy has taken incentive-induced investment in the country to a new level. One of the policy's chief critics is the Ministry of Finance (MoF), which estimates a Rs 1,60,000 crore revenue loss due to the tax incentives provided to SEZs. But the Ministry of Commerce (MoC) maintains that in the long run, returns from SEZs will be greater than this current loss. One of the primary reasons the MoC is arguing for high tax breaks is that industry needs incentive to enable it to invest and overcome the gestation period after which returns on investment will start pouring in. But there are several concerns on the incentive structure being provided to the tourism industry through STZs that need to be addressed:

- The tourism industry and all of its components hotels, restaurants, other entertainment activities do not have high gestation periods as in large-scale industry projects and start seeing returns fairly early. In that case, the argument of providing 10-year long tax breaks or subsidized land on lease for 30 years does not seem necessary or rational
- The fear of loss in tax revenue is particularly valid for state governments in the case of tourism. The proposed STZs would be providing 100% tax exemption on central taxes and in addition a 10-year waiver from luxury tax and lower VAT for tourism specifically. Luxury tax is one of the prime sources of revenue for state governments dependent on tourism that brings in revenue to service debt and other social expenditure. In its Budget for 2006-07, the Kerala government increased luxury tax on hotels, houseboats and halls and exhibitions (all tourism enterprises) to 15% to bridge its Rs 7534.54 crore fiscal deficit and provide relief to the state's farmers²¹. An exemption from luxury tax for tourism enterprises would take away an important source of revenue for all governments.
- The luxury hotel industry in India is booming, estimates place the turnover of the five-star hotel industry in India at Rs 43 billion²². The high demand and shortage in supply of luxury

21. Refer "Tax on luxury items to mobilise more revenue in Kerala Budget", **The Hindu**, 24th June 2006

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2006062404980700.htm&date=2006/06/24/&prdt=th&>

22. Refer "Booming hotel sector", 14th August 2006, Rajender Menen, **Gulf News Report**, http://archive.gulfnews.com/supplements/india2006/more_stories/10060093.html

rooms in commercial capitals like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Pune and Kolkata to cater to largely business travelers has shot up room tariffs. The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India's (FHRAI) Indian Hotel Industry survey 2004-05 reveals that in five-star deluxe, five-star, four and three star category of hotels in seven major Indian cities²³, over 70% of the guests were business guests. In Bangalore, for example, average room rates have increased from Rs 4109 in 2003-04 to Rs 6792 in 2004-05 a 60% increase. With such a boom, hotel sector profits are on a high and likely to stay so that way. Hotel stocks have been trading high with companies like Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) registering a 1396% increase in profits in the April-October 2006 period as compared to last year²⁴.

So far, the nature of tourism activities being proposed within SEZs and STZs is of building 2000-3000 luxury hotel rooms, catering to the elite international traveler. And this is the kind of "tourism" that would be promoted to fill the demand that booming business is creating. With rising hotel stocks and the ability to pay, hotels today are well positioned to pay the taxes that currently apply to tourism industry. Therefore, providing tax cuts that deprives governments of their revenue for development when the industry can pay up is irrational and unjust.

- The STZ proposal offers exemption from import duty on capital goods²⁵ for the tourism industry. The FHRAI itself registers that import duty for capital goods (largely agricultural, meat and dairy items; liquor and other alcoholic items and machinery) used by the hotel industry has drastically come down in the last 4-5 years and quantitative restrictions completely removed. In the tourism sector, imports directly constitute a revenue leakage, thereby reducing the receipts and downstream income gains from the activity. World Travel and Tourism

23. Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Kolkata, Chennai and Goa

24. Refer "ITDC registers over 1000% profits in April-October", 20th November 2006

http://www.zeenews.com/znnew/print_articles.asp?aid=336874&ssid=53&sid=BUS

25. Capital goods and intermediate goods used in the production of the final good or service for consumption

Council (WTTC) estimates place import-induced leakage of tourism in India at 45% - this means for every tourist who spends one dollar in India, 45 cents leave the country to pay for goods imported to serve the tourist. In such circumstances, the government must formulate policies that reduce the import leakage by sourcing raw material from local, domestic suppliers. This would help in retaining a higher percentage of tourism earnings domestically and support suppliers of ancillary goods and services. However, by providing import duty exemption on capital goods, the government is only increasing the incentive to import for tourism that will potentially increase the leakage and reduce local gains from tourism.

A law unto themselves – enforcement of environmental and labour regulation in STZs?

STZs and environmental regulation

No section of the SEZ Act lays down that environmental regulations are applicable to units within SEZs. Rather the wordings in Section 49 and the SEZ Rules categorically state that SEZ areas are outside the purview of the environmental regulations of the country. There are no provisions for monitoring the cumulative environmental impacts of all units coming under one SEZ or periodic review of the ecological effects of functioning of these industries in such zones. Further, large-scale services – related activities like tourism, lead to excessive use of water, increased deforestation and environmental pollution in these areas without any regulatory blanket.

With respect to STZs, the matter is even more serious with the recent Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006 excluding tourism projects from the requirement of EIA clearances. Thus, the democratic spaces available to communities to decide on tourism development or voice their dissent /consent to projects under the available Environmental Clearance Regulations are not applicable to tourism industries. This change would bring a wider range of projects that are not directly tourism-based but related to it like shopping malls, entertainment facilities and amusements parks within the bracket of tourism to avail of this exemption.

The Indian Constitution contains specific provisions on environmental protection. The Directive Principles of State Policy²⁶ and the

Fundamental Duties²⁷ explicitly call for protection of the environment. Judicial interpretation over the years has strengthened this constitutional mandate²⁸. It would thus seem that the present exclusion of SEZs and the proposed STZs from environmental regulation is against the “Rule of Law” and the “Principles of Natural Justice” which are basic tenets of our Constitution.

STZs and labour regulation

Section 49 of the original SEZ Bill had the words “*Central government may, by notification, direct that any of the provisions of this Act or any other Central Act or any rules and regulations made there-under or any notification or order issued or direction given thereunder ... specified in the notification shall not apply to a SEZ*”. Intense lobbying by Left parties persuaded the government to accept the suggested Amendment. The government deleted clauses that exempted application of labour laws in SEZ areas and the proposal of exempting application of State Acts relating to trade unions, industrial and labour disputes, welfare of labour, including conditions of work in SEZs.²⁹

However, this does not solve the problem. Section 19 of the SEZ Act allows the central government to delegate all administrative powers relating to SEZ development to the Development Commissioner (DC) or the Approval Committee (AC) (which also includes a member of the Developer of the SEZ but does not include any representative of the local self governing institutions [LSGI] or from the local community). This means that even the powers of the central government to refer disputes for adjudication, abolition of contract

26. Article 48-A of the **Constitution of India**: Protection and improvement of environment and safeguarding of forests and wildlife.

27. Article 51-A(g) of the **Constitution of India** : To protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures.

28. Refer **M.C. Mehta v Kamal Nath** (Span Motels Case) 1997 (1) SCC 388; and **M. I Builders v Radhey Shyam Sahu** AIR 1999 SC 2468, 2498. The Apex Court in both these cases laid down that, “*The State is the trustee of all natural resources which are by nature meant for public use and enjoyment. The public at large is the beneficiary of the sea-shore, running waters, air, forests and ecologically fragile lands. These resources cannot be converted into private ownership.*”

29. Refer to the Proviso of Section 49(1) of SEZ Act, 2005.

labour and other issues related to labour welfare can be so delegated to the DC³⁰. As a result, in most states, like in Andhra Pradesh³¹, all powers of the Labour Commissioners are getting transferred to the DC. According to Prasant Bhushan, a senior advocate in Supreme Court of India, "...it is a clear case of excessive delegation of power to an executive."³²

Such delegation of power is questionable. Historically the office of the Labour Commissioner (LC) was set up in April, 1945 for prevention and settlement of industrial disputes, enforcement of labour laws and to promote welfare of workers in the undertakings falling within the sphere of the Central Government. According to Section 11 of the SEZ Act, 2005, any central government officer not below the rank of Deputy Secretary to the Government of India can be appointed as the DC. Hence, the question arises does such delegation of power to "any central government officer" ensure that the concerns of the labour force, working in these SEZs would be addressed. In contrast to the role of Labour Commissioners, the specific role of the DC is the development and propagation of the SEZ. Moreover, observers apprehend, there could be a corridor of uncertainty as far as the commissioner's position vis-à-vis the labourers on the one hand and the developers on the other goes. So, it is a farce to believe that the DC will uphold labour laws. As quoted about T V Chandran, one of the Assistant Development Commissioners of the Cochin Zone, "We cannot bother about the conditions under which the employees work nor about the contract labourers."³³ This trend to dilute the meagre provisions and protection of organised workers as seen in the bid to ensure that India shines and is competitive, is likely to be given freer hand in the SEZ regime. The fate of a majority of unorganised labour, who contribute approximately 63% to the GDP and constitute 93% of

30. Refer "SEZs: Special Exploitation Zones!" Sanjay Singhvi, March 2006, <http://cpiml.in/060326.htm>

31. Section 6.1: The State Govt. delegates power of Labour Commissioner to the DC. As per the order issued by Chief Secretary, Industries and Commerce Department Policy Framework for Special Economic Zone (SEZs) in Andhra Pradesh

32. Refer "SEZ How?" **Down to Earth**, 15th November 2006, pg 20

33. Refer "SEZs: Special Exploitation Zones!" Sanjay Singhvi, March 2006 <http://www.indiatogether.com/economy/>

Cases of state labour laws being diluted in lieu of SEZs

In Andhra Pradesh, state labour laws have been amended to make it possible to declare all the units in a SEZ as "public utilities" under the Industrial Dispute Act for an indefinite period, thereby making legal strikes impossible. A Bill is also pending to amend the Trade Union Act, making it compulsory for all office bearers of the Union to be elected only from among persons actually working in the establishment, effectively abolishing "outsiders" from becoming a part of the union. Moreover, notifications have been issued under the Bonus Act, the Payment of Wages Act, and other Acts giving the powers of inspectors under those Acts to the Development Commissioner under the SEZ Act, 2005.

In Maharashtra, a Bill making a similar amendment in the Contract Labour Act, differentiating between "core" and "non-core" activities has been passed in the Assembly and is awaiting the signature of the Governor. Similar notifications have been brought out to make units in SEZs "public utilities". Notifications have been brought out to empower the Development Commissioner to hear cases for the payment of gratuity. He will also have the powers of inspectors under the Payment of Bonus Act, the Maharashtra Minimum House Rent Allowance Act, the Motor Transport Workers Act, the Payment of Wages Act and many other Acts.

In Karnataka, the powers of the Labour Commissioner under the 1) Trade Union Act 1926; 2) Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) 1946; 3) Industrial Disputes Act 1947; 4) Contract Labour (R&A) Act 1966; 5) Inter State Migrant Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1963; 6) Minimum Wages Act 1948; 7) Payment of Bonus Act 1965; and 8) Equal Remuneration Act 1967 have all been given to the Development Commissioner. The Karnataka State Government has also declared all units in SEZs to be "public utilities".

In Uttar Pradesh, a short and clear notification has been issued giving the powers of the Labour Commissioner under "all labour laws" to the Development Commissioner of the SEZ. Here the provisions of Chapter V (against illegal retrenchment, closure and lay-off) have also been made inapplicable in SEZs.

Similarly in Madhya Pradesh, besides making all units "public utilities", section 9A of the Industrial Disputes Act, (requiring agreement with the union before effecting a change in service) has been made inapplicable to SEZs. Some Standing Orders have been made inapplicable to the SEZs and even some sections of the Factories Act and the Shops and Establishments Act, relating to hours of work and holidays have been changed.

employed labour force³⁴, is another chapter. Using these sections many State Governments have already made amendments to labour laws in their states.

According to the website of Navimumbai SEZ one of the benefits to units in SEZ is that, "Reservation policies for Small-scale Industries ("SSIs") would not be applicable within the SEZ zones, enabling units within the SEZ to engage in industries that have traditionally been reserved for SSIs³⁵". This has a huge implication towards the large, small scale and cottage industry base in the country that can hardly compete in a level playing field. Small scale and cottage industry has been a source of survival and sustenance to a large section of urban and semi urban poor as well as rural artisan and craftsmen communities.

The above analysis of how labour laws and regulation is being significantly diluted to benefit "unhampered and even unaccountable" SEZ has relevance to tourism as well. There are significant issues of labour rights and protection like contract labour, wages of working hours, gender disparity and discrimination, child labour (which is particularly high in hotels and restaurant sector) and even sexual exploitation that need formal redressal within labour laws. If STZs are to be the model for tourism development, there is little possibility of these issues being addressed. STZs, in fact, are likely to shrink the space for the organised working class. The fate of the large sections of informal and unorganised labour sector, which constitute 40.37% of the employment in the tourism industry³⁶ is thus likely to become even more pitiable.

Bypassing local governments and ignoring local communities

The SEZ Act and its implementation are raising serious concerns about the phenomenon of centralization of power. The Board of Approval, which is the final authority with respect to granting of approval to SEZs and laying down conditions of approval, is a central body under the aegis of the MoC. All other authorities from DC to the AC are

represented by the Central Government. The Act also very specifically lays down that all these authorities would be bound by such directions on the question of policy as the central government may give from time to time and its decision shall be final. Similarly, in the case of STZs, the proposals are being mooted and approved by the Ministry of Tourism and implemented by the state governments. The approach is inherently top-down and leaves no room for local communities and their representing institutions to have a say, contribute to, or reject the proposals. With ACs having statutory representation from the developer but no space for representation from communities nor elected representatives of the local self governing institution, it is apparent that there is no role for elected bodies in these enclaves making it an overriding of designated structures and rights of democracy and governance in the country.

It is clear that local institutions are going to be bypassed by the proposed "Single Window Clearance" mechanism, which is being stressed for STZs. The Single Window System enables investors/developers to submit regulatory documents at a single location and to a single entity. Such documents are typically customs declarations, applications for permits/ licenses, and other supporting documents such as environmental clearances and labour-related licenses. In all likelihood, such a mechanism will free the investor/developer from approaching the relevant authority, probably even the local authority like the *panchayat*/municipal corporation, by granting all approvals at one place.

This special status to STZs will encroach upon the rights of local self-governments such as gram panchayats and urban local bodies in violation of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. It denies local communities the sovereignty to decide over the status of their lands and natural resources, which is the basis of local economy and sustenance. While the demand for greater local control and decentralization is on, this reversal to centralized and non-consultative processes is not justifiable. The SEZ Act also does not grant powers to local governments on SEZs and STZs within their jurisdiction³⁷. This would be a clear disadvantage for local

34. Refer "Informal Sector India", presentation made by **Wage Indicator India team at the first Worldwide Wages Conference**, Amsterdam, 21-27 June 2006. <http://wageindicator.org/documents/wwwmeetingjune06/informalindia>

35. <http://www.navimumbaisez.com/overview.htm>

36. Id 33

37. This has been a strong argument of local bodies against the formation of Special Tourism Areas as well.

governments that are anyway suffering from a dearth of resources and options to sustain their activities.

In sectors like tourism, such a development process can sound the death knell for long-term economic sustainability. Tourism benefits local communities only if activities undertaken are suited to their abilities, skills and priorities and takes into account regional specificities of ecology, culture and society.

With the above concerns, we believe that the STZ concept needs to be seriously challenged and debated in the country at all levels. Most importantly, local communities need to be consulted in this move considering that they are the most impacted and even the targeted beneficiaries (in the words of the government) of this proposal. It is highly disturbing that while private players – who have an obvious interest in the STZ proposal – have been privy to the discussion and to shaping it, key stakeholders and rights holders groups that the government is accountable to have been left out of the process. We call upon the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce and State Tourism Departments to open the proposal to public scrutiny, debate and consult with local governments, communities and interested civil society organisations before proceeding with this proposal.

This also opens the debate on the nature and models of tourism the government will keep privileging in its policies, marketing, promotion, subsidies, incentives and even accountability.³⁸ That leaves us with the question of who really benefits from tourism and is this the tourism that large majority of people in this country really asked for, need or deserve?

38. It is interesting to note that in a recent interview Ms Ambika Soni, the Union Minister for Tourism and Culture has emphasised on low budget domestic tourism. According to the minister, the need of the hour is to cater to the requirements of the domestic Indian tourist that include inexpensive accommodation and basic infrastructure and connectivity. Refer "Interview: Ambika Soni, Tourism Special" **India Today**, Tourism Special, November 2006.

An update on the campaign against Special Tourism Zones in India

The concept of identifying specific exclusive areas/zones for intensive tourism development is not new in India. It was first introduced in the National Tourism Policy of 1992 through Special Tourism Areas (STAs). When the STA policy was proposed in 1992, some of the identified locations were Bekal (Kerala), Sindhudurg (Maharashtra), Diu, Kancheepuram and Mahabalipuram (both Tamil Nadu). The proposal never took off and where it did, faced stiff resistance from local communities.

With recent information of the National Tourism Advisory Council's (NTAC) proposal to revive this policy in the new *avatar* of STZs, groups around the country have been urging the Ministry of Tourism, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture and State Tourism Departments to seriously reconsider this proposal. The main arguments on the infeasibility of this model are summarised below:

- The STZ mode clearly privileges luxury and elite tourism. The benefits go either to private players or repatriate profits outside the country in the form of "leakages". Enclavised tourism (as Special Tourism Areas and similar models around the world have shown) have resulted in strong opposition from local communities as they bear costs of loss of land, livelihood, basic rights, and in return get very little benefits.

- The economic rationale of providing high subsidies, tax sops and highly concessional terms proposed in STZs is both questionable and unjustified.
- The broad range of concerns and arguments against SEZs, such as land use, displacement, serious dilution of environmental and labour regulations, overruling of the constitutional right of local self-governance will apply to STZs as well.

In response to concerns raised and letters sent, the campaign had responses from Shri Sitaram Yechury, MP, Rajya Sabha, CPI (M)) and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture and Shri Prabhat Patnaik, Chairperson State Planning Commission Kerala who committed to take the matter up at the highest level. Mr Yechury, raised this issue with Minister for Tourism and Culture, Ms Ambika Soni. In his letter he has drawn the government's attention to economic, environmental and social concerns relating to STZs. "The proposal of NTAC concerning the creation of STZ is creating some concern," he said and asked the government to examine the entire issue before it takes a final decision¹.

The Minister of Tourism assures that STZs have only come up as a matter of recommendation from the NTAC and that the Ministry is yet to take any decision with regard to STZs². However, this by no means implies that the matter is settled. Experience with government calls for the campaigns to sustain pressure on the government and continue to remain alert of their moves.

The issues of STZs is now entering serious debate even at the state level. Recently, Kerala's Minister for Tourism Mr. Kodyeri Balakrishnan stated that SEZs will not be created in the tourism sector in the state by acquiring government land and would be considered if private

parties having large tracts of land approach the state government³. The Minister also said the government would change the rules relating to acquisition of land for tourism projects in the state. Groups in the state have taken the matter up with protest letters and sign-on statements.

Although the Ministry of Tourism says that the policy is still only being "proposed", the truth of the matter is that tourism is an integral part of investment in SEZs. The industry is investing heavily in SEZs locations for setting up hotels, resorts, restaurants and other hospitality facilities within SEZs⁴. The fact that tourism-related investment is very high in all SEZs and not only STZs makes the matter worse as the compounded effect on local communities and the environment will be much higher. It is important that groups around the country monitor the nature of money and players involved in tourism-related SEZ investments so that prompt collective action can be taken. It is also critical that groups put pressure on state governments not to buy-in to the STZ model which is completely unsustainable from all perspectives.

1. Refer to the official Letter of Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture to the Minister of Tourism, dated 16th January 2007.

2. Refer to the official Letter of the Minister of Tourism to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, dated 24th January 2007.

3. Refer "No tourism SEZs on Government land", **The Hindu Online Edition** 3rd March 2007.

<http://www.hindu.com/2007/02/03/stories/2007020309110400.htm>

4. Refer to the update on recent tourism ventures in SEZs, provided in this booklet.

**Support to the campaign - Letter from the
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport,
Tourism and Culture to the Ministry of Tourism and
Culture on the STZ issue and the latter's reply**

SITARAM YECHURY
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
(RAJYA SABHA)
Leader
CPIM Group
CHAIRMAN
DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT,
TOURISM AND CULTURE



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A.K. Gopalan Bhavan, 27-28
Bhai Veer Singh Marg,
Gole Market, New Delhi-110004
Tel. 23344319, 23747428

January 16, 2007

Dear Smt. Ambika Soni ji,

The proposal of the National Tourism Advisory Council concerning the creation of Special Tourism Zones (STZ) is creating some concern. Enclosed is a letter that I have received as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, concerning the STZ.

May I request you to kindly have the matter examined since your replies to a question in the Rajya Sabha on 19th December, 2006 denies any proposal of an STZ.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)
(SITARAM YECHURY)

Smt. Ambika Soni
Minister of Tourism & Culture
Government of India
NEW DELHI.

पर्यटन एवं संस्कृति मंत्री
भारत सरकार
परिवहन भवन, नई दिल्ली 110001
MINISTER OF TOURISM & CULTURE
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
TRANSPORT BHAWAN, NEW DELHI 110001

अम्बिका सोनी
Ambika Soni

January 24, 2007

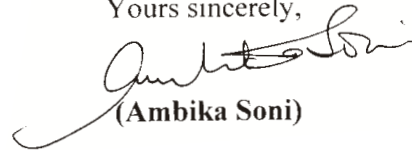
Dear *Shri Yechury*,

Please refer to your letter of 16th January, 2007 regarding your concerns about creation of Special Tourism Zones in our country. I wish to clarify to you at the outset that this subject matter came up as a matter of recommendation by a member of the National Tourism Advisory Council at its last meeting on 27th November, 2006. These recommendations have no mandatory force. As I had categorically mentioned in the Parliament the Ministry of Tourism has not taken any decision in this regard.

Secretary (Tourism) was only suggesting at the FIIRAI meeting that the existing tourism destinations should be developed in an integrated manner. His view seems to have been misunderstood; it has nothing to do with establishment of Special Tourism Zones.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,


(Ambika Soni)

Shri Sitaram Yechury
Member of Parliament
(Rajya Sabha)
124, Parliament House Annexe
New Delhi-110 001.

“A lo Latino” but still the same: Experiences of Special Tourism Zones in Latin America

By Julia Schonhart¹ - ECOT²

Special Tourism Zones are spreading throughout the world, especially in so-called less developed countries. They are said to generate employment and income, and thus, help to reach the Millennium Goals. The concept, similar to Free Trade Commercial Areas in terms of tax redemption, low interest rates, and the prospect to earn foreign currencies, are the main motivating factors for the respective governments to declare such areas with not competitive tourism potential.

From a human rights point of view, however, local and indigenous communities are challenged due to their limited possibilities to participate in the planning process, to economically gain from those zones (as they will only get low paid job) and also to defend their lands and cultures from being sold off by their own governments.

1. Julia Schönhart, M.A. Tourism Management, has joined the Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) in January 2007.

2. Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) is a coalition of regional Ecumenical Organizations and over seventy secular and faith-based groups. It works with global ecumenical and other partners to unite people around collective efforts that negate the undesirable effects of modern tourism and, in its place, institute socially responsible and ethically oriented tourism. It believes that tourism must be based on justice and sustainability for host communities and, that tourism planning and practice must be democratized. The ECOT advocates for respect for the protection and dignity of the human rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and workers in tourist trade.

Case Studies

Afro-Caribbean Garifunas peoples in **Honduras**³ residing all along the Caribbean coast of the country and the Caribbean Bahía islands are struggling to defend themselves against the negative impacts of the declared special tourism zone development. As the islands and part of the coast have been chosen by the rather neo-liberal Honduran government and the World Bank (WB) as ideal destinations for cruise ship tourism, sand & beach and diving tourism, and so-called cultural tourism using the “exotic and erotic” Afro-Caribbeans community and indigenous organizations don’t feel respected but rather exploited and discriminated. As highlighted in ECOT’s recent publication⁴ OFRANEH and ODECO, the two major Garifuna organizations, continue to claim their rights to develop community tourism rather than foreign-investment driven tourism.

Special Tourism Zone Development in all Latin American countries does offer more or less the same setting of tax incentives. It includes exoneration of real estate tax for up to 20 years as long as the real estate is used for tourist activities; exoneration of payment of import and sales tax, as well as of payment of any tax and contribution or encumbrances in regards to the use of ports, berths or airports built by the investor. Topped by even the exoneration of income tax derived from tourism activity of the investor and of the income tax levied over the interests received by the creditors in respect to operations directed to the investment in the tourist activity, the whole set of pure free trade is applied.

3. Honduras is a country in Central America. It is bordered to the west by Guatemala, to the southwest by El Salvador, to the southeast by Nicaragua, to the south by the Pacific Ocean at the Gulf of Fonseca, and to the north by the Gulf of Honduras and the Caribbean Sea. During the 1980s, the United States established a very large military presence in Honduras with the purpose of supporting the anti-Sandinista Contras fighting the Nicaraguan government (leftist government), and to support the El Salvador military fighting against the FMLN guerrillas (members of Nicaraguan political party founded on the broad communist principles). It also supported the Honduran army when it quietly waged a campaign against leftists which included extra judicial killings and forced disappearances of political opponents by government-backed death squads. Refer <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honduras>

4. Tourism Scan, Volume 3, Issue 1, 2007,

As a UK based property investor website⁵ states in their Emerging Markets Section, the formerly Spanish and English colonized countries of Central America today are considered different with regards to poverty, political unrest and economical positions which once characterized the Latin American communities. With massive political investment into the tourist industry, 'Special Tourist Zone' incentives for overseas investors, discounts for retirees and leisure activities aplenty, the countries are promoted to overseas property buyers.

Panama City, the capital of Panama⁶, often referred to as the 'Banking Capital of Latin America', today appears alongside emerging Eastern European destinations in property developers' investment hotspot predictions. The rise in Panama's prominence on the property investment map has been brought on, in part, by the growth of the country's economy and the recent vote in favour of widening the Panama Canal expected to generate jobs and a subsequent economic boost. While tourism is seen as huge contribution to the country's economy, the country has become the most popular choice for US-Americans looking to buy homes outside of their own country. Investment in private and corporate properties, particularly with tourism purposes, are booming with golf courses, gated communities, beach homes and - apartments. Furthermore, as an upscale coastal area on the market the **Amador Causeway**⁷ consisting of three islands, has been identified by the Panamanian government to make it a cruise ship port and a world-class marina with shopping complexes satisfying the consumption hype of rich tourists being developed.

5. Refer **World of Property**

(http://www.worldofproperty.co.uk/emerging_markets-203.htm)

6. Panama, officially the Republic of Panama is the southernmost country of Central America. Panama is a transcontinental nation which connects North America and South America. It borders Costa Rica to the northwest, Colombia to the southeast, the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. It is a democratic country much of whose domestic politics and international diplomacy in the twentieth century was tied to the Panama Canal and the foreign policy of the United States. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama>

7. At the southern entrance of the Panama Canal is the Amador Causeway. This beautiful and picturesque causeway, lined with tropical palm trees, and with magnificent views of the Canal and the Panama City skyline, was built from excavated material during Canal construction. The Causeway was formerly part of a military base, which has been transformed into a flourishing tourist attraction.

Also **Venezuela**⁸, after the re-election of Hugo Chavez, looks set to become increasingly popular with overseas investors. **World of Property**⁹ announces that Chavez's commitment to the development of tourism and outside investment, coupled with the comparatively low cost of entering the Venezuelan property market is due to create an increase of investment interest. Any tourism-based initiative in the country is welcomed with low interest loans, 12-month payment pause and even free governmental marketing assistance.

But as a result, property prices on the Venezuelan mainland have risen by 45 per cent in the last year. As there are hundreds of miles of land still available, this rise is likely to continue. Many companies have already started to push the adventure sports market in Venezuela; skydiving operations, kite surfing resorts and surf schools are springing up. But who will gain from that tourism we have to ask! Would these in actual terms benefit the local industry and the Venezuelans?

Our journey continues up north, to **Mexico**¹⁰, home of the busiest tourist airports in the world. Here, the Riviera Maya is regarded to offer some of the best investment opportunities and is designated a prime tourist development zone. With its epicentre Cancun suffering from a more than dubious image in critical tourism circles, I don't have to ask what impacts the Special Tourism Zone setting had... Population

8. Venezuela is a country on the northern coast of South America. It borders Guyana to the east, Brazil to the south, and Colombia to the west. A former Spanish colony, Venezuela is a federal republic. Venezuela is known widely for its petroleum industry, the environmental diversity of its territory, and its natural features. Venezuela is among the most urbanized countries in Latin America; the vast majority of Venezuelans live in the cities of the north. Although living standards are generally rising, Venezuela continues to battle high levels of poverty. Refer <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela>

9. <http://www.worldofproperty.co.uk/default.htm>

10. Mexico is a country located in North America, bounded on the north by the United States; on the south and west by the North Pacific Ocean; on the southeast by Guatemala, Belize, and the Caribbean Sea; and on the east by the Gulf of Mexico. It became a constitutional republican federation of thirty-one states and a federal district in 1824. As the only Latin American member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 1994, Mexico is firmly established as an upper middle-income country. Federal elections held in July 2000 marked the first time since 1929 that an opposition party defeated the Institutional Revolutionary Party at the national presidential race, culminating a process of political alternation that had begun at the local level since the 1980s. Refer <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico>

volume growth non stop; the famous Playa del Carmen has increased from 25,000 to over 140,000 inhabitants in the last year.

We find a similar situation in **Belize**¹¹, where foreign land ownership, favorable taxation laws and an esteemed banking industry, made the country join the list of investment hotspots. But hasn't Belize evolved into a world-renowned ecotourism and adventure destination? You may ask. Yes, indeed, the marketing and promotion machinery run so well that it is still experiencing an exceptional tourism and development boom, according to a Caribbean Properties consultant. It is interesting however that although government has given extensive financial incentives for overseas property investors, such as zero income tax, zero capital gains tax and off-shore banking, it has also set aside 46 per cent of the land under environmental preservation policies.

Now, take a side view and think about the insurance and re-insurance costs for the highly demanded ocean-front properties, in such hurricane prone area. All Latin American and Caribbean countries, particularly the Mexican Gulf and Caribbean small islands are facing often devastating meteorological phenomena (such as torments, hurricanes, cyclones, flooding, earthquakes, fires), especially in highly developed tourism areas.

Of course, each country is different depending on the geographic situation and fragility of terrestrial and marine ecosystems as well as regarding the environmental management, zoning and disaster management. But a probable mid term threat to many are phenomena like droughts which will have impacts on the tourism development, especially for the aforementioned Tourism Zones. Those have a high seasonal demand for water. Due to the probable privatization of water supply to those areas, prices will rise and rural communities will face problems to pay for it. In addition, water will be scarce for their traditional, income generating activities such as agriculture.

11. Belize is the capital of British Honduras, in Central America. It trades in mahogany and rosewood. In the recent years it has become a prime destination for tourists. <http://www.fromoldbooks.org/Wood-NuttallEncyclopaedia/b/belize.html>

Will governments include sustainable land use in their "sell out" strategies considering the potential problems like scarcity of water due to climate change and all that? Negative effects of tourism in designated areas/zones must not be underestimated. They will cause social resentments against the establishment of special tourism zones but also against the visitors per se¹².

In **Nicaragua**¹³, where former Sandinista Daniel Ortega returned to power, a rather contradictory development can be observed: according to e-news on agonist.com, the former Marxist guerrilla claims now that the impoverished nation needs tourist dollars and foreign investment. Ortega hopes to accelerate a tourism boom which has already brought hordes of backpackers, surfers and retired Americans to Nicaragua's beaches and colonial towns. But at the same time, a number of indigenous community groups, supported by Spanish development cooperation agencies, created the **Nicaraguan Network of Rural Community Tourism** (RED NICARAGÜENSE DE TURISMO RURAL COMUNITARIO¹⁴). Members are aware that tourism has become the main income generating source for the country and now want to have their share in this sector's development. They see the need to develop tourism infrastructures in order to create income alternatives, organized community groups (cooperatives, unions, indigenous associations) and will focus on tourism as an integral element of local economic development. One can just hope that they will manage all by themselves and rather not sell their lands off to multinational investors. Thus, avoiding (forced) evictions and being overseen from their national authorities when it comes to selling lands to foreigners. It happened to some Mapuche families in **Chilean Patagonia**¹⁵. They just re-settled on a property from which they had got evicted years ago when the Italian Enterprise

12. Françoise Carner, **VULNERABILIDAD DEL SECTOR TURISMO**, October 2002. ECLAC

13. Nicaragua is a democratic republic in Central America. The country is bordered on the north by Honduras and on the south by Costa Rica. Its western coastline is on the Pacific Ocean, while the east side of the country is on the Caribbean Sea. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua>

14. <http://www.tourisme-solidaire.org/ressource/pdf/ecotours.pdf>

15. The most famous region of Chile, Chilean Patagonia offers all the dramatic landscape one would expect from the world's ultimate land's end. Here the South American continent falls away in a explosion of islands, glaciers, icebergs and mountains. <http://www.geographia.com/chile/patagonia.htm>

Benetton again bought their land from the government¹⁶. These families just returned to that area and Benetton, afraid of negative image, is keeping quiet - for now.

Besides the aforementioned settings for tourism investment, other similar projects supported by the World Bank or the IFC (International Finance Corp), do have impacts on regional settings, including now tourism - although this is not intended as such. For **Argentina**¹⁷, a controversial pulp mill project in **Uruguay**¹⁸ will have negative impacts on Argentina's tourism due to environmental damage to the shared Uruguay river. This will threaten the rather small-scale tourism infrastructures in Argentina, as Valente mentioned in a private conversation. The policy of the World Bank and friends often hides negative impacts and lack of participation. Although research requirements of ecological, socio-cultural impacts etc. are analysed in further details, World Bank projects tend to be short sighted and all but holistic.

As it happened in Honduras, the majority of residents of the zone affected by the tourism projects are against these projects. According to them they were never asked for their opinion and participation during the planning and implementation of the projects. The grand Micos Beach Resort on the Caribbean North Coast of Honduras, which as per the project proponent supposedly make the entire surrounding communities gain from economic development and protect indigenous culture. In reality, however, is quite a disaster¹⁹. Asking the people if they share the idea, the majority gets angry. Just

very few from the local communities have got selected to be trained and employed in these tourism establishments. The indigenous Garifunas don't see their land rights respected, and their migration to the US continues in high volumes.

To summarize, in Latin America Special Tourism Zones don't make the dream come true of a fair and sustainable tourism development. To the contrary, the governments, under pressure from IFIs and UN agencies to fulfil the Millennium Goals and to repay their debts are welcoming foreign investors to purchase lands and invest in tourism infrastructure. With respect to employment, local people are employed for short term employment in low paid jobs. The number increases during the construction times, when the demand for low paid labour increases. Migrant workers, who are not guaranteed under the regulations of the General Agreement on Trade and Services, are also employed in large numbers.

16. As **Tierramerica** correspondent Marcela Valente reports. www.tierramerica.org

17. Argentina is a country in southern South America. It ranks second in land area in South America, and eighth in the world. It is bordered by Paraguay and Bolivia in the north, Brazil and Uruguay in the northeast, and Chile in the west and south. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argentina>

18. Uruguay is located in the southeastern part of South America. It is bordered by Brazil to the northeast, the Uruguay River to the west, the estuary of the Río de la Plata (literally "River of the Silver", but commonly known in English as "River Plate") to the southwest, with Argentina on the other bank of both, and finally the South Atlantic Ocean to the southeast. About half of its people live in the capital and largest city, Montevideo, just 530 Km². It is the most politically and economically stable and the second least corrupt country in Latin America. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uruguay>

19. As per personal research undertaken by Julia Schonharl, the writer of this article, in 2003-2005.

A compilation on recent tourism ventures across different SEZs in the country

The Bangalore city-based Century Building Industries Pvt. Ltd has charted out a plan to set up a SEZ for facilitating the establishment of educational, health and hospitality infrastructure. The SEZ would also have a foreign investor as partner. The SEZ, planned on a 2,500-acre land, will come up near the proposed Bangalore International Airport, off Devanahalli Road. According to Mr Pai, the representative of the company **the Century group was also engaged in developing hotels with a 75-room new three-star hotel planned in the city.**¹

In what is the country's - even the subcontinent's - most ambitious infrastructure project to date, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Group and the Maharashtra government (through Public Sector Units) are out to create two sprawling SEZs across 14,000 hectares in Navi Mumbai and Maha Mumbai. The Navi Mumbai SEZ is spread over an area of approximately 4,377 hectares (around 44 square kilometres) comprises four zones, Dronagiri, Kalamboli, Ulwe and the regional park zone (RPZ) of 1,850 ha. The RPZ is proposed as a green belt and no industrial activity is envisaged in this zone. This zone is to be utilised for recreational activities and proposed infrastructure in the zone includes a club house, golf course and other recreational facilities amenities.²

1. Refer "Century Building plans to set up SEZ", **Business Line**, Bangalore, 15th December 2006

In a few years from now, farmlands will begin to give way to a soaring skyline with hi-tech buildings, interspersed with amusement parks, shopping malls and an 18-hole international golf course; residents will walk (hopefully) from their highrise condominiums to their workplaces.³

According to a recent news paper report, a tender was called up by City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) in Mumbai for developing a five-star hotel project in the central business district of Belapur in Navi Mumbai on a land of 10,377 sq.mts. Major hotel chains have filed their bids. The bidders are giants in the hotel sector like Le Meridien, Taj and Marriott, Dadar-based Pritam Hotel and Kamath group among four others. This would be the first five-star hotel of Navi Mumbai.⁴

Emaar MGF has brought in the most FDI amounting to approximately US\$1 billion in the Indian real estate sector. The company is engaged in pan-India projects in residential, commercial, infrastructure and hospitality sectors in integrated master plans and special economic zones.⁵

2. Refer <http://www.navimumbaisez.com/overview.htm>.

3. Refer "Mukesh Ambani's great gamble", Surajeet Das Gupta & Makarand Gadgil, <http://inhome.rediff.com/money/2006/apr/15spec1.htm>

4. Refer "India Market Wrap-Up" **Hindustan Times**, 13th Febrary 2007 <http://www.colliers.com/Markets/India/News>

5. Refer Emaar-Accor JV to build 100 budget hotels in India, 27th November 2006 <http://business.maktoob.com/hotelnew.asp?id=20061127061753&Pass=1>

A compilation of articles on the STZ issue in India

Kalam suggests setting up three SEZs in Meghalaya

16th March 2007, Press Trust of India

(<http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/002200703161550.htm>)

President A P J Abdul Kalam suggested setting up of three special economic zones (SEZs) in Meghalaya for Rs 2500 crore additional revenue to the state's kitty and creation of 25000 employment opportunities.

Kalam suggested creation of an SEZ in Shillong for farming of herbal, aromatic and ginger varieties, leading to production of drugs and aromatic products for export.

Another SEZ could be located in a place that attracted tourists -- like one surrounded by waterfalls -- with a museum of tribal cultures along the lines of Chhattishgarh, orchid floriculture farm and a science and technology park, he said.

The third one, Kalam said, could be centred around mining of special material and associated products.

Surajkund mela to go international Haryana for special tourism zones, Palace-on-Wheels stopovers

31st January 2007, Vibha Sharma, Tribune News Service
(<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070131/nation.htm#3>)

Haryana will soon have a brand-new tourism policy on the lines of Kerala to set up special tourism zones (STZs) throughout the state.

Regarding setting up of STZs, Ms Chowdhary said the first STZ would come up along the 138-km Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) highway.

Being developed as global economic corridor, the multi-crore, access-controlled KMP expressway would be at a par with European expressways. The KMP STZ project was a part of a large plan to set up several other zones in the state. To be able to do so, the state government would first bring in a special tourism policy in about six months.

An international consultant had also been appointed to identify areas in the state where STZs would come up. The zones would be all-encompassing and have facilities like hotels, restaurants and multiplexes, besides entertainment zones for children.

Now, Left has problem with tourism zones

27th January 2007, Times News Network

(<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1480094.cms>)

After SEZs, Special Tourism Zones are now under the red scanner. The CPM has expressed concern about the proposed STZs and asked the government to examine the entire issue before it takes a final decision.

In a letter to minister of tourism and culture Ambika Soni, CPM polit bureau member and MP Sitaram Yechury has drawn the government's attention to economic, environmental and social concerns relating to STZs. "The proposal of the National Tourism Advisory Council concerning the creation of special tourism zones is creating some concern," Mr Yechury said.

Though the minister had said in parliament last month that the matter was still under consideration and no decision has been taken, the

proposal for creation of STZs has already started causing worries, echoing the resistance to SEZs. Mr Yechury, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on tourism, enclosed a letter sent to him by an NGO listing objections to the STZs proposal.

The letter said, "STZs and like-named models promote enclavisation which in the context of tourism refers to the process of converting tourism locations into exclusive islands where elite tourism can flourish thereby detaching them from the local environment, culture and economy."

It also pointed out that the potential of tourism-related activities would be high in all SEZs considering that only 25% of the area needs to be devoted to industrial activity while the rest can be used for infrastructure, which includes roads, housing hospitals, hotels, leisure and recreation and entertainment facilities.

The letter raises the issues of displacement of people, rehabilitation, environmental regulations, labour laws, tax exemptions, rights of local governments and regional imbalances in opposing the current proposal.

Govt planning to set up Special Tourism Zones

03rd December 2006, Press Trust of India
(<http://www.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=77705>)

With a view to making a more focussed effort at developing the tourism industry, the Centre is considering a proposal to set up Special Tourism Zones (STZs) on the lines of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

The STZs are proposed to be located in the major tourist destinations, cities as well as along the coastline.

Each STZ should be able to provide 2,000-3,000 hotel rooms, about 100 odd restaurants, facilities for shopping, entertainment etc, according to the recommendations of the sub-committee of the council on 'public-private partnership'.

Secretary Tourism proposes Special Tourism Zone

November-December 2006, pg 17, FHRAI Magazine
(www.fhrai.com)

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has proposed the setting up of a Special Tourism Zone (STZ) at various parts of the country to give a boost to the tourism industry.

Stating this, Union Tourism Secretary, Mr. A K Mishra said that under the ministry's proposal, the state governments could identify the land and, through the single window process, could encourage private companies to venture in a public private partnership.

He was speaking at the national convention of the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (FHRAI) being organized here. (The 42nd Annual Convention of FHRAI at Chandigarh, November 10-12, 2006)

Mishra said that the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Civil Aviation and the state governments have to work in tandem to boost tourism and raise infrastructure in the country. "Land owing agencies must adopt proactive land policy whereby land could be given by way of lease on annual rental basis," he said.

Mr. Mishra also laid emphasis on the fact that all hoteliers all over India should make it appoint to adopt public utilities all over India especially on the highways.

Borrowing SEZ idea, Centre starts working on Special Tourism Zones

7th November 2006, The Indian Express, New Delhi

The Special Economic Zones (SEZs) may be generating political heat but the Government is borrowing the SEZ idea to plan Special Tourism Zones (STZs).

The National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC), the official think tank of Tourism Ministry, met on November 27 to discuss the concept note on STZs which has made some strong recommendations on the lines of

SEZs. Some states, including Haryana and Kerala, have already told the Centre they are game for STZs.

The concept note suggests:

- STZs be located in tourist destinations, cities, along the coastline
- Government should provide single window clearance
- 100% tax exemption for a period of 10 years
- Each STZ should be able to provide 2,000 to 3,000 hotel rooms.
- Facilities for shopping, entertainment
- Exemption from import duty on capital goods
- Withdrawal of luxury tax, lower VAT etc.
- Exclusive NRI tourism zones or elite world tourist zones for high-end global tourists

The concept paper, prepared by a sub committee appointed by the NTAC, makes clear that STZs with a clear-cut policy and plan in consultation with big private players in the field of tourism and related services is essential for the growth of tourism.

Restoration of monuments and setting up new ones wherever necessary, aesthetic landscaping and upkeep, creation of tourist shopping avenues, village and cottage industries, cultural learning and performing centres, provision of multilingual and cross-cultural service providers with help of private institutions, are part of the Special Tourism Zones development plan.

State asked to give 10,000 hotel rooms 2010 Commonwealth Games

11th October 2006, Tribune News Service
(<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20061011/haryana.htm>)

The Centre has asked Haryana for 10,000 hotel rooms for the Commonwealth Games to be held in New Delhi in 2010.

The Minister of State Tourism, Mrs Kiran Chaudhary, said that the state had decided to ask its various agencies like the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA), Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) and private

colonisers and promoters of SEZs to earmark sites for construction of hotels to be ready by 2009.

She said the Centre had desired that rooms should be arranged in Faridabad and Gurgaon districts, adjoining the national capital, which can also be used after the Games.

Mrs Chaudhary said a tourism zone would also be developed along the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Express Highway being constructed in Haryana around the national capital. The details of the zone were yet to be worked out, she said, adding that a foreign consultancy firm had been engaged for preparing the blueprint.

Special tourism zones would boost Kerala's economy

20th September 2006
(http://www.domain-b.com/industry/tourism/20060920_zones.html)

Even 'God's own country' needs active tourism promotion. T Damu, vice-president, Indian Hotels Company, and member of the national tourism advisory council, ministry of tourism, moots the idea of tourism promotion zones to tap Kerala's tourism potential.

Kerala is one of the top-listed tourism destinations in the world. Then shouldn't the government of Kerala think of developing 'special tourism zones' (STZs) in the state, which has been benefited and continues to be benefited by the revenues generated by tourism and the related services in the state? Why not?

Two decades have gone by ever since tourism gained the status of an industry and tremendous developments have taken place in the tourism industry. In view of this tremendous growth potential of the tourism industry, the insatiable requirement of tourist infrastructure is of high magnitude. It is therefore essential that special areas are created on the lines of SEZ in the state.

Some South East Asian countries like Philippines, Thailand, etc, that have recently been making headlines in the world of tourism, are going a step further and developing special tourism areas with special packages for the investors in these tourism zones and marketing them to the world traveller. One of the finest examples of a

developing country in the world that turned around its economy by developing STZ in line with SEZ is UAE.

Areas that have great tourism potential around the tourist destination cities as well as along the coastlines of Kerala could be identified and developed as STZs. Each special tourism zone should be able to provide sufficient facilities for accommodation and dining, facilities for shopping, facilities for entertainment, etc.

Create land banks for hotels; simplify the procedures for setting up tourism projects. There must be a single window clearance for each project. The government should enter into partnership with the private sector by way of allocating land for tourism projects on long-term lease or revenue sharing basis. Sound terms and conditions must be formulated for such public-private partnership programmes.

The private sector would be able and only too willing to provide all the facilities and services inside the zones, provided the government offers some concessions and incentives in similar tones in tune with the SEZ; like 100-per cent tax exemption for a specified initial period until such STZs become fully viable and sustainable, exemption from import duty on capital goods, raw material, consumables, spares, withdrawal of luxury tax, lower VAT, etc. All the concessions available to the special economic zones could be fine-tuned to the special tourism zones.

Restoration of monuments and setting up of new ones wherever necessary, aesthetic landscaping and up-keeping, outsourcing of some facilities like the ITES, creation of tourist shopping avenues, village and cottage industries, cultural learning and performing centres, provision of multilingual and cross cultural service providers with the help of private institutions, etc, should be part of the STZ development plan. Well-planned complete zones where tourists could have novelty in tourism experience in the state would attract more and more tourists from newer countries. Exclusive NRI tourism zones or elite world tourist zones for high-end global tourists could also be developed.

Declaring STZs with a clear-cut policy and plan in consultation with big private players in the field of tourism and related services is the first step. When the government is ready to give necessary support

services in the form of infrastructure and tax relief, private investors will come flocking in to take the concept to its dazzling heights, resulting in the creation of even newer infrastructure in the region, increased economic activities and also employment generation for the dependent communities in the areas that fall in the STZs.

Preference could be given to under-developed areas like the the Malabar region, some of the unexplored charming coastal areas of Kerala, the plantation regions such as the High Range and Wyanad.

By taking up such bold sustainable developmental projects will in turn dispel the notion among global investors that Kerala is still a sore spot of simmering labour problems. If a Budhadeb Bhattacharya could turn around the destined-to-be-a-Left state, West Bengal, would the new government under the leadership of a people-friendly 'VS' (chief minister V S Achuthanandan) not able to change the face of Kerala by such innovative economic policies?

The revenue generated in the economy of Kerala due to tourism is estimated to be more than Rs4,000 crore, which is around 6.5 per cent of the state's GDP. The direct and indirect employment in tourism in Kerala is estimated at around 9 lakhs. Such is the strength of Kerala's tourism, which could further be strengthened by developing well-planned STZs in the state.

SEZ for tourism at Gorai: The Gorai-Manori belt will be developed by state government as a major tourist attraction

18th September 2006, Ravikiran Deshmukh, Mumbai Mirror

Faced with a growing concrete jungle and no worthwhile tourist attractions in India's financial capital, the state government is planning a Special Economic Zone to boost tourism in Mumbai.

To give shape to this grand tourist vision, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) has appointed EPC development and management, a consultant group based in Ahmedabad, to prepare a master plan to develop the Gorai-Manorai belt of 700 to 800 hectares.

The consultants have been asked to make a blueprint of major tourist attractions on the 40 km stretch.

Currently the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) has in its possession over 250 hectares of land at the location, said Bhushan Gagrani, secretary in the tourism department.

According to Gagrani, major portion of the land comes under the Coastal Regulation Zone and mangroves comprise 50 per cent of the area.

In addition, some private land scattered around 4-5 villages can be tapped for the proposed tourism SEZ which was announced by the state government as tourist and entertainment destination for the metropolis, he added.

Since availability of land in and around Mumbai is a major problem, Gorai and Manori was thought as an ideal location, he said, adding that the SEZ will accommodate an arts and crafts village, snow village, oceanarium, helium baloon among other tourist attractions. The MTDC is gearing up to shoulder the responsibility of planning and regulatory authority for the proposed SEZ.

Chandra pitches for gaming SEZ: SEEKS to launch entertainment SEZ in Mumbai

1,000 hectares to roll Disneyland, Vegas, Hollywood into one

14th March 2006, Monica Gupta & Bipin Chandran, Business Standard, New Delhi

In a trailblazing move, the Subhash Chandra-promoted Essel Group is developing a 1,000-hectare entertainment special economic zone (SEZ) near Mumbai.

The group will invest Rs 500 crore in developing the zone that promises to be Disneyland, Hollywood and Las Vegas rolled into one. The land for the venture has been identified in the Gorai-Manori-Uttan region, near Essel's existing amusement park at Mumbai.

The group has sought the Centre's permission for the SEZ. Confirming the development, Ashish Kaul, vice-president (brand), Essel Group, said, "We are finalising the plans and are looking at various options to build it."

The options include setting up of a recording studio, an animation studio, editing facilities, uplinking and broadcasting facilities, resorts and amusement parks.

By locating the venture in an SEZ, Essel can avail of 100 per cent income tax exemption for the first five years and 50 per cent for the next five years. For five years after that, it will get income tax benefits on its re-invested income. It will also enable the group to import equipment and machinery free of duty.

The export obligation of the SEZ will be fulfilled by catering to a large number of overseas tourists who will be required to pay in foreign exchange. "Foreigners can dock at the SEZ, use the facilities and go back," an official in the ministry of commerce said. Indian visitors to the SEZ will have to pay in rupees and will also be required to pay taxes.

Essel's proposal is among the ten large SEZ proposals.

Haryana plans special tourism zones

13th February 2006

(<http://www.rediff.com/money/2006/feb/13tour.htm>)

The Haryana government is considering the proposal to set up special tourism zones on the pattern of special economic zones in the state and places of historical importance would be developed as tourism destinations with the cooperation of the archaeology department so as to promote tourism and the state's rich cultural heritage in a big way.

Disclosing this Haryana Minister of State for Tourism and Forests, Kiran Chaudhary said that the places of historical importance, which would be developed as tourism destinations, would also be inter-linked to facilitate tourists. She said that the tourism in Haryana would be developed as a big industry as it would not only yield revenue for the state, but also generate employment opportunities.

She said that according to an estimate, as many as 40 crore (400 million) domestic and foreign tourists would visit various tourist destinations during the next financial year, therefore, tourist places,

based on 'Haryanvi culture' would be developed at different places to attract them.

She said that a new policy was being formulated for conservation of forests and increase the green cover in the state. Under this policy, common people would be associated with forestation and students would be encouraged to plant more trees.

Haryana offers hotel sites to meet Common wealth Games challenge

Deepak Arora, The Tribune Online
(<http://www.thetribuneonline.com/tourism-archives03.htm>)

Haryana has taken the lead over Delhi by inviting private entrepreneurs to set up hotels, motels and entertainment sites like water parks and health spa in the State to meet the challenges posed by the Commonwealth Games to be held in 2010.

In an interview, Mr Sanjay Kothari, Secretary, Haryana Tourism, said Haryana Government under the leadership of Chief Minister, Mr Bhupinder Singh Hooda, plans to set up tourism zones in Kundli, Manesar and Palwal. The State Government has also proposed to develop entertainment and recreation zones.

Mr Kothari invited hoteliers to set up as many hotels in Haryana as they wanted. "With its proximity to the Capital city Delhi and a proposal to set up an international airport in the State, Haryana is going to be a hot tourism destination," he said. He said Haryana, which has led the nation in the concept of launching highway tourism, plans to build new highways from Kundli to Manesar and then to Palwal that would join Delhi-Agra highway.

The Government has also invited the private sector to set up adventure tourism facilities at Kalesar and also to develop heritage tourist sites.

Annexures
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Established in 1985, EQUATIONS is an advocacy and campaigning organisation charged with the vision of democratising tourism in India. We believe that alternatives to the current models of mass tourism are viable and we have demonstrated this in innovative partnerships that place local communities' needs and rights at the centre of decision-making and benefits of tourism development.

We build networks of people - grassroots organisations, local communities, panchayats and local self governance bodies, activists, researchers, trade unions, legal and policy experts - who are concerned, as we are, with ensuring that tourism planning, policy and implementation is equitable, people-centered and just.

We interface and advocate with policy making, policy influencing and policy implementing bodies - the government, the judiciary and industry to influence tourism development that is participatory, sustainable, accountable and non-exploitative.

In the last two decades, our work has focused on the impacts arising out of unregulated and irresponsible tourism development in India and the developing world. We do this through research, information analysis and dissemination, campaigns, advocacy and lobbying. We actively support communities and local groups in their efforts to change the paradigm of unjust and unsustainable tourism development.



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